

AGENDA



Recommendation for Council Action

AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL
Regular Meeting: May 24, 2018

Item Number: **006**

Austin Water

Approve an ordinance amending City Code Chapter 15-9 (Utility Service Regulations) relating to service line extensions, water service termination, and unexpected high water use and leaks.

Lead Department	Austin Water
Fiscal Note	This item has no fiscal impact.
Prior Council Action	May 19, 2016- Council approved Ordinance No. 20160519-003, amending City Code Sections 15-9-141 and 15-9-142. November 9, 2017- Council approved Ordinance No. 20171109-045, amending City Code Section 15-9-142.
For More Information	Drema Gross, 512-974-2787; Denise Avery, 512-972-0104
Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action	May 9, 2018- Recommended by the Water and Wastewater Commission on a 10-0 vote with Commissioner Penn absent.

Additional Backup Information:

This item proposes changes to City Code Chapter 15-9-1, 15-9-31, 15-9-101, 15-9-101, 15-9-141, 15-9-142, 15-9-151, 15-9-152, 15-9-158, and 15-9-173.

Several of the proposed changes are intended to align Code language with existing Austin Water policy related to infrastructure, service line relocations, and requirements for wastewater disposal facilities. Additionally, as part of our efforts to improve the customer experience following high bill complaints and meter reading errors in the fall of 2017, Austin Water is recommending changes to City Code 15-9-141 Adjustment of Excess Water Bill if Leaks are Repaired, and 15-9-142, Adjustment of High Volume Water Bill in direct response to concerns expressed by Austin Water customers, commissioners and City Council following an increase in high bill complaints in Fall 2017.

Changes to City Code Sections 15-9-1, 15-9-31 and 15-9-152 clarify that the Director or designee may refuse to provide water services to a property that does not have an approved means of wastewater disposal. They also update language to reflect the correct title of regulations.

Changes to City Code Section 15-9-101 provide that the utility may terminate service if, after notification, a customer fails to comply with requirements relating to private wastewater laterals and onsite sewage facilities.

Changes to City Code Sections 15-9-151 and 15-9-158 modify language to be consistent with existing policy and clarify that in certain circumstances, it may be the customer's, and not the City's, responsibility to provide the infrastructure required to obtain service.

Changes to City Code Section 15-9-173 extends the time a customer has to reconnect to a relocated service line from 60 to 120 days.

Austin Water is proposing changes to City Code 15-9-141 Adjustment of Excess Water Bill if Leaks are Repaired, and 15-9-142, Adjustment of High Volume Water Bill, in response to concerns expressed by Austin Water customers, commissioners and City Council following an increase in high bill complaints in fall 2017.

Austin Water recommends amending City Code Section 15-9-141 to credit customers who repair leaks for 100% of the amount of water consumed over their expected volume. Customers have expressed frustration that those experiencing leaks, which often require hiring a plumber for repair, are not eligible for the same level of credit as customers with unexplained high use. The proposed amendments also change the types of leaks eligible for adjustment, making the code less restrictive.

Austin Water further recommends changing City Code Section 15-9-142 to reduce the minimum length of service history required for customers to apply for a high volume water bill adjustment from 12 to 4 months in addition to the disputed period. Additionally, recommended changes to this section include expanding the methods available to calculate a customer's expected volume so that they are consistent with those available under the leak adjustment policy. This will broaden the safety net for customers experiencing an unexplained high water

bill, allowing relief for more customers under this policy.

Changes to hearing eligibility are also being proposed under both adjustment sections. Current policy allows customers to request an Administrative Hearing or apply for an adjustment, with the adjustment decision being final. Customers have expressed to staff that they because of this policy, they are choosing to request a hearing rather than apply for an adjustment that may not be approved. This increases the number of hearings, and lengthens the time to resolution for customers. The recommended changes will continue to allow customers to request hearings without making an application for adjustment, but will also enable customers to request a hearing if an application for adjustment is denied. Austin Water hopes this will encourage more customers to seek relieve through the administrative adjustment processes, resulting in speedier and more satisfactory resolution of leak and high bill cases

Austin Water recommends these revisions to the Utility Service Regulation to provide relief to customers who experience unexpected high water bills related to leaks and other unidentified events. These changes also clarify hearing eligibility, and provide greater consistency between adjustment procedures.